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Writing in High School/Writing in College: Research Trends and Future Directions

This article synthesizes and extends data from some of the most prominent and promising large-scale research projects in writing studies while also presenting results from the authors' own research. By juxtaposing these studies, the authors offer a complex understanding of writing practices at the high school and college level. Future directions are suggested in light of these research findings.

We have long heard of the declining state of literacy among high school and college students. This despair has lead periodically to large- and small-scale empirical studies examining the state of literacy instruction in the United States, and at this historical moment, more stakeholders than ever are involved in collecting and analyzing large-scale data on writing instruction in the United States. These stakeholders range from the U.S. Department of Education (National Assessment of Educational Progress, otherwise known as the Nation's Report Card), testing/assessment organizations (e.g., College Board), nonprofit educational organizations (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement), professional organizations (e.g., Writing Program Administrators and Conference on College Composition and Communication), and individual institutions (e.g., Harvard University, Stanford University, and University of

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Denver). Despite the sometimes contradictory and puzzling results, we find the turn toward this type of research both a promising sign and a cause for alarm. It is promising when reflecting an increased commitment to writing instruction as well as an increased commitment to rigorous research on literacy acquisition in general. At the same time, while some of these research results are encouraging, others point to the persistence of major concerns (which we address later in the article) as well as a shift away from a focus on writing instruction in K–12 classrooms.

Our first goal in this article is to identify some of the most promising and problematic trends identified by recent large-scale research in writing studies in order to begin articulating what we know about literacy practices in high schools and colleges at this moment. Specifically, we focus on deep learning, genres, and writing beyond school. Such articulations can be vitally important when they improve our ability to provide greater access to literacy across all contexts at a time when technological advances are greatly altering writing landscapes (e.g., see NCTE's *Writing in the 21st Century* by Kathleen Blake Yancey).

Second, we wish to move beyond articulation of what we know now and begin pointing toward directions in which literacy studies should be heading. Now more than ever, there is an urgency to demonstrate the value of writing

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across the curriculum at local and national levels. The current fiscal crisis facing school districts and universities across the United States is leading to increased class sizes, increased teaching loads, and even the elimination of core requirements

as we all scramble to balance budgets that are not expected to improve in the near future. It is our hope that by culling and discussing the results of these large-scale projects, we as a field will gain a clearer insight into what it is we already know about writing and what new opportunities might be available to us. We begin with an overview of several important studies to date, including our own; following that, we bring the results of these major projects into conversation with another as we set our sights on the future.

An Overview of Recent Large-Scale Studies of Writing Instruction in the United States

Here we provide a brief overview of our own large-scale research as well as some of the most prominent research conducted by others. While this overview is not

exhaustive, it does include representative stakeholders and highlights emerging trends in large-scale writing research over the past decade.

CCCC Research

The research we have been conducting is supported by a grant from the Conference on College Composition and Communication. The purpose of this research, as described by CCCC, “is to create an empirically-based description of student writing in high school and college settings.” Our research is different from other similar types of research in that we are gathering both direct and indirect evidence of how high school and college students and faculty experience writing instruction across the curriculum. Using a variety of in-depth measures, we strive to describe writing based on the experiences of both students and teachers by gathering evidence from a diverse sample. To this end,

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our research includes three high schools (one suburban public high school in a relatively affluent neighborhood [27% free/reduced lunch and 7% drop-out rate], one urban high school in a relatively poor neighborhood [63% free/reduced lunch and 26% drop-out rate], and one private, all-girls Catholic high school), as well as two community colleges, two four-year public institutions, one four-year private institution, one public MA-granting institution, and one doctorate-granting, flagship institution.

We began with a survey (see Appendix) of both faculty and students from across the curriculum. Their majors/departments ranged from industrial technology and religious studies to business and psychology. We then asked for volunteers among the survey participants to continue with our research by completing an additional questionnaire and submitting a portfolio of all writing assigned or completed during the course of the semester. Twenty-one faculty and fourteen students from various institutions and departments participated in this ongoing research. The response to this part of our research was not as high as we had hoped, and we plan to expand this phase of our research in order to gather more direct evidence. In short, however, our research selects for a diversity of institutions, collects both direct and indirect evidence, includes an in-depth survey instrument, and compares answers to essentially the same questions from both students and teachers in high school and college. Initial results from our research both confirm and complicate the findings of other large-scale projects.

Consortium for the Study of Writing in College

The parameters for research similar to ours are quite different and, as you will see in the discussion following this overview, lead to a comparison of results that is at times enriching and other times puzzling. For example, one of the most important developments in large-scale writing research for our field is the recent partnership between the Council of Writing Program Administrators and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Since 2000 NSSE has been offered as an alternative to popular rankings of colleges (e.g., *U.S. News and World Report*). The primary goal of NSSE is helping faculty and students improve the undergraduate experience. As described on NSSE's homepage: "Survey items on The National Survey of Student Engagement represent empirically confirmed 'good practices' in undergraduate education. That is, they reflect behaviors by students and institutions that are associated with desired outcomes of college." Institutions that elect to participate in NSSE can use this survey of good practices to measure their own practices against similar institutions as well as benchmarks established by NSSE.

In 2007 NSSE and WPA entered into a formal collaboration. The most recent published results of the National Survey of Student Engagement, which include twenty-seven questions on writing developed with the Council of Writing Program Administrators, give us new cause to argue for the value of what faculty and students are doing in our classrooms. These questions were given to 23,000 students across the country and are rooted in our current understanding of best practices in writing instruction. The WPA/NSSE collaboration is now known as the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College, and a list of the questions administered can be found at http://comppile.org/wpa+nsse/docs/27_Question_Supplement.pdf.

National Commission on Writing

One of the most widely circulated ongoing research efforts comes from the National Commission on Writing, which was created by the College Board in 2002. As the College Board explains on the National Commission of Writing's website:

The decision to create the Commission was animated in part by the Board's plans to offer a writing assessment in 2005 as part of the new SAT®, but the larger motivation lay in the growing concern within the education, business, and policy-making communities that the level of writing in the United States is not what it should be. Although there is much good work taking place in our classrooms, the

quality of writing must be improved if students are to succeed in college and in life. (*Writing: A Powerful Message*)

Among the many reports issued by the National Commission on Writing, we are primarily concerned with the results published in *Writing: A Ticket to Work . . . or a Ticket Out* and *Writing, Technology and Teens*. For the former report, the National Commission on Writing sent a survey to the human resource directors of 120 major American corporations affiliated with Business Roundtable. Combined, these corporations employ nearly eight million people. Survey results revealed that two-thirds of salaried employees in large American companies have some writing responsibility, inadequate writing skills are a barrier to promotion, certain types of writing are commonly required, and an estimated \$3 billion is spent each year training employees to write. The report *Writing, Technology and Teens* is a joint venture between the commission and the Pew Internet and American Life Project. Through telephone interviews and focus groups, this research seeks to understand the role writing plays in the lives of American teens and gathers their input on ways to improve school-based writing instruction. Reports such as these are, of course, also used to update and refine the SAT, especially the relatively new SAT Writing Test.

National Curriculum Survey and National Assessment of Educational Progress

A similar organization to the College Board, ACT, Inc., administers the National Curriculum Survey every three to five years. This survey is far more narrow in scope than those conducted by College Board. The National Curriculum Survey is sent to middle and high school teachers as well as college instructors who primarily teach introductory college-level courses. The goal of the survey is to collect information on what writing, reading, science, and math skills are expected of entering college students. Importantly, this research is also used to update common academic standards as well as ACT assessments such as PLAN for tenth graders and the ACT for eleventh and twelfth graders.

Another influential study including middle and high school students is the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which “is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America’s students know and can do in various subject areas” (NAEP homepage). The NAEP began in 1964, and in 2007 it included a writing assessment and background questionnaire that was administered to 140,000 eighth graders and 27,900 twelfth graders. The assessment measured a variety of writing tasks (persuasion, narrative,

etc.), and the background questionnaire asks for demographic information as well as a few questions about the types of writing students do in school. An analysis of this data by Arthur Applebee and Judith Langer suggests that not only do we need to improve K–12 writing curriculum and instruction but also that external forces (e.g., high-stakes testing, increased emphasis on reading, etc.) may be leading to a lack of assigned writing of significant length or complexity prior to entering college.

Institutionally Based Research

In addition to the research above, we must also add to our overview a relatively new model of writing research that, although institutionally bound, still has much to teach us about conducting longitudinal research in writing as well as how students develop as writers. In particular we are referring to the Harvard Study of Writing (begun in 1997), the Stanford Study of Writing (begun in 2001) and the Longitudinal Study of Writing at the University of Denver (begun 2007). These studies trace large numbers of students over their academic careers, and sometimes beyond, providing very valuable local knowledge while also expanding knowledge in our discipline. For example, the Stanford Study of Writing “is a five-year longitudinal study investigating the writing practices and development of Stanford students during their undergraduate years and their first year beyond college in professional environments or graduate programs” (“About the Study”). Using a series of questionnaires over this five-year period as well as interviews with a subgroup of students, researchers at Stanford hope not only to improve writing instruction at their local site but also to make important contributions to longitudinal studies of writing development and writing across the curriculum.

The widely varying parameters of these studies and lack of access to raw data make it difficult to assert strong conclusions across all studies except in a few cases. Nonetheless, placing these studies in conversation with one another does allow us to draw valid inferences upon which to base ongoing research and plans for the future. In the following section we compare research results across the large-scale studies outlined above as we move toward articulating the trends, promises, and puzzles found not only in the results but the research itself.

Deep Learning and Writing Instruction

At its core the National Survey of Student Engagement measures the extent to which institutions engage in practices that lead to high levels of student

engagement. The results produced by NSSE have been used to establish a set of benchmarks for good educational practice at the college level. When the Council of Writing Program Administrators joined forces with NSSE, the collaborative venture was seeking not only more information on writing instruction in the United States but also an understanding of the extent to which engaging in certain types of writing instruction measures up to NSSE's benchmarks. Thus, the first set of responses to the writing-specific questions was used both to establish five scales that describe the quality of undergraduate writing and to establish that certain types of writing are "substantially related to NSSE's deep learning subscales,¹ especially higher-order thinking and integrative learning. . . . Taken together, these findings provide further support for the movement to infuse quality writing experiences throughout the curriculum" (22). The five scales are

Pre-Writing Activities: How much students got feedback from faculty and others about their writing ideas and drafts.

Clear Expectations: How much instructors provided clear explanations of the goals and criteria of the writing assignments.

Higher-Order Writing: How much students wrote assignments involving summarization, analysis, and argument.

Good Instructor Practices: How much students collaborated with classmates, reviewed sample writing, and were assigned practice writing tasks.

Integrated Media: How much students included numerical data, multimedia, and visual content in their writing. (22)

Table 1 displays how students responded to questions upon which the scales were built. It is no surprise to many that the five scales defined by NSSE are substantially related to their deep-learning subscales. What is important here is empirical confirmation by an independent organization of the value of much of what we already do. As valuable as these insights are to writing studies in general, it is important to view these latest findings as one layer of data in relation to the many other studies in print that not only provide further support for these findings but also expand upon and complicate them.

For example, the 2002–2003 National Curriculum Survey administered by ACT, Inc. included responses from 1,099 college and 828 high school faculty in composition/language arts. Both high school faculty and college faculty ranked

Table 1. National Survey of Student Engagement Results

	First-Year	Senior
<i>For how many writing assignments have you:</i>		
Talked with instructor to develop ideas before drafting	67%	67%
Received feedback from instructor about a draft	75%	63%
Received feedback from classmate, friend, family about a draft	74%	64%
Visited campus-based writing center to get help	31%	19%
<i>In how many writing assignments did you:</i>		
Analyze or evaluate something you read, researched, observed	91%	91%
Argue a position using evidence and reasoning	80%	73%
Explain in writing the meaning of numerical or statistical data	43%	50%
Create the project with multimedia (web page, poster, etc.)	45%	68%
<i>In how many writing assignments has your instructor:</i>		
Explained in advance what he or she wanted you TO LEARN	84%	82%
Explained in advance the grading criteria he or she would use	90%	91%
Asked you to do short pieces of writing that were not graded	54%	36%
Asked you to give feedback to a classmate about a draft	65%	38%
Response options included 1 = no assignments, 2 = few assignments, 3 = some assignments, 4 = most assignments, and 5 = all assignments. To view all 27 questions and their exact wording visit www.nsse.iub.edu/pdf/Writing_Questions_2008.pdf . Source: National Survey of Student Engagement, 22, Table 9: Percent Responding "Some," "Most," or "All" Assignments to Selected Writing Items.		

skills classified as “writing as process” as more than moderately important, with the top three process or prewriting skills for both groups being “Selecting a Topic and Formulating a Thesis,” “Editing and Proofreading,” and “Revising Focusing on Content” rather than mechanics (9). Similarly, when ranking the most important purposes of writing, high school and college teachers agreed on four of the top five purposes: “Developing logical arguments and supporting them with valid evidence,” “writing an argumentative or persuasive essay,” “writing expository prose,” and “analyzing an issue or problem” (9). This ranking of skills and purposes by faculty is in line with NSSE’s deep-learning subscale. But in the ACT Writing Surveys, much like the NAEP questionnaires, even though faculty highly rank process-oriented writing instruction, we can’t know what this means if the survey instrument is not detailed enough. As Applebee and Langer note in their analysis of NAEP results: “what teachers mean by this [process-oriented instruction] and how it is implemented in their classrooms remains unclear. The consistent emphasis that emerges in teachers’ reports may mask considerable variation in actual patterns of instruction” (26). This, of course, suggests a need for more in-depth studies that can unmask potential variations such as the current collaboration between the Center on English Learning and Achievement and the National Writing Project (<http://www.albany.edu/cela>). But it also calls upon researchers to analyze raw data above and beyond that presented in final reports. For example, in taking a closer look at the ACT data, Patterson and Duer found a significant difference in the types of writing skills reportedly taught in classes of students identified as primarily college bound versus those who are primarily non-college bound (84–85). While the sample used to draw this conclusion is admittedly small, it does warrant a closer look at whether the persistence of tracking is contributing to the degree to which the achievement gap between students of different socioeconomic and racial groups also persists as identified by the NAEP.

The writing activities reported in the Stanford Study of Writing also closely reflect the kinds of activities associated with deep learning. During their first year, students reported being assigned to do eighteen different kinds of writing; this broad range of genre persisted through the four years, though the ratio differed from year to year” (Stanford Study of Writing par. 1). As Figure 1 indicates, the majority of the writing students are listed as examples of higher-order writing on NSSE deep-learning subscale.

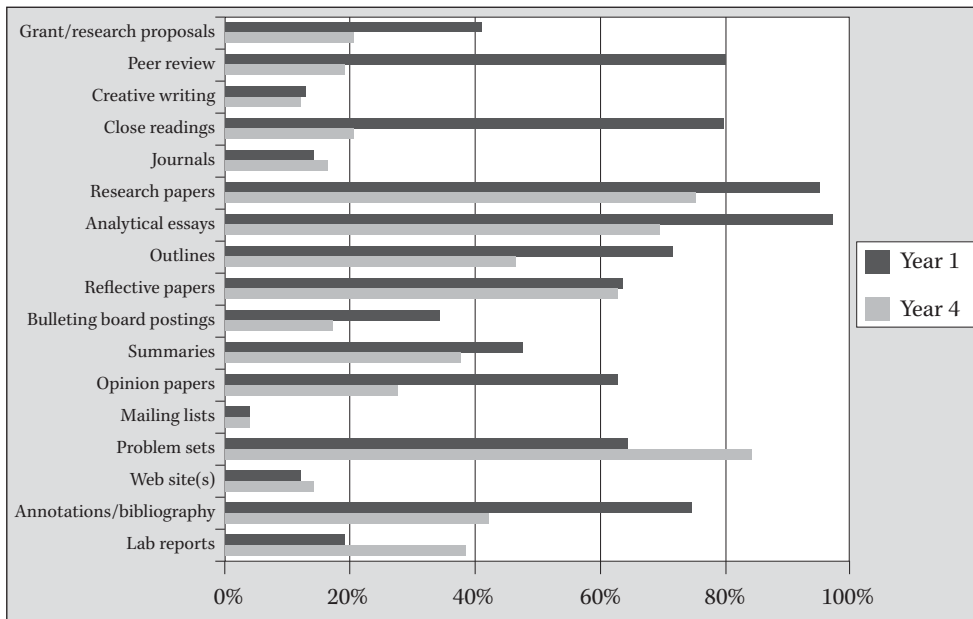


Figure 1. Stanford study results for kinds of writing, year 1 to year 4. Source: "Kinds of Writing."

Many of the initial results of our own research in this area are largely in line with these other results. Because our study varies from the NSSE/WPA collaboration in terms of depth, we can offer results that extend, and sometimes challenge, these results as well as common current practices. Indeed, while at first glance the NSSE results and related research validates some of our work, a closer look complicates these findings in ways that call upon faculty and administrators to do more to promote deep learning using writing across the curriculum. For example, further investigation of the data shows that of the five scales developed by NSSE there is significant adherence to, at best, only three (prewriting, clear expectations, and assigning higher-order writing) across the curriculum, and even these are subject to speculation.

As mentioned earlier, in our own research our goal has been to gather direct and indirect evidence of how both students and faculty experience writing instruction across the curriculum. We began with a survey (see Appendix) of both faculty and students from across the curriculum. In our initial survey, 544 faculty and 1,412 students participated. Of the faculty, 22% were high school,

11% were community college, 19% were four-year public, 16% were four-year private, 8% were MA-granting public, and 24 % were doctorate-granting public. Of the students, 13% were high school, 26% were community college, 6% were four-year public, 2% were four-year private, 8% were MA granting public and 47% were doctoral public. Their majors/departments ranged from industrial technology and religious studies to business and psychology.

Tables 2 and 3 focus on questions from our surveys related to prewriting, clear expectations, and good instructor practices (as defined by NSSE). It is interesting to note the moments of convergence and divergence between high school and college faculty as well as faculty and students as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

College and high school faculty across the curriculum are generally aligned with one another when it comes to prewriting, clear expectations, and good instructor practices. Most differences are relatively easy to explain. For example, while 58% of college faculty report sending students to institutional support services for writing, only 18% of high school faculty report doing so. This result perhaps reflects that most U.S. high schools do not operate writing centers or other institutional support services, instead relying on classroom teachers or paraprofessionals to do the work except in clearly defined circumstances (e.g., special education). We see two significant differences between college and high school faculty, however, that may merit further consideration: college faculty are far less likely than high school faculty to (1) provide opportunities for informal, exploratory writing or (2) have students read/respond to other students' work. Both of these components of literacy instruction are held in high esteem among writing specialists and reaffirmed by NSSE as activities that contribute to deep learning. Thus, while NSSE has identified common writing instruction practices related to deep learning, our results suggest that in at least these two areas of writing—exploratory writing and peer review—high school faculty promote a greater variety of writing activities that promote deep learning than college faculty. Of course, additional data is needed to more fully substantiate this claim. Both college and high school faculty report a lower rate of good instructor practices.

The degree of alignment between high school and college faculty, or the fact that more high school faculty in our sample reported engagement in deep-learning activities (better teaching practices?) than college faculty, may

College and high school faculty across the curriculum are generally aligned with one another when it comes to prewriting, clear expectations, and good instructor practices.

Table 2: Comparison of College and High School Faculty Teaching Practices

Faculty Teaching Practice	Always	Some	Never
<i>Require Multiple Drafts on Writing Assignments</i>			
College Faculty	30	51	17 ^a
High School Faculty	30	50	16
<i>Provide Written Feedback on Early Drafts</i>			
College Faculty	47	38	12
High School Faculty	39	41	14
<i>Conference with Students on Papers in Progress</i>			
College Faculty	17	46	32
High School Faculty	31	40	23
<i>Have Students Read/Respond to Other Students' Work</i>			
College Faculty	19	36	41
High School Faculty	26	55	14
<i>Provide Written Descriptions for Writing Assignments</i>			
College Faculty	78	15	3
High School Faculty	67	25	5
<i>Provide Grading Criteria Early in the Writing Process</i>			
College Faculty	67	23	6
High School Faculty	63	28	7
<i>Provide Opportunities for Informal, Exploratory Writing</i>			
College Faculty	27	32	35
High School Faculty	40	39	12
<i>Discuss Examples of Good Writing in Class</i>			
College Faculty	44	41	13
High School Faculty	45	46	4
<i>Discuss Writing with Your Class</i>			
College Faculty	56	34	7
High School Faculty	60	29	4
<i>Provide Handouts/Checklists/Examples</i>			
College Faculty	54	34	9
High School Faculty	58	33	5
<i>Provide References/Handbooks/Websites</i>			
College Faculty	52	33	11
High School Faculty	36	42	17
<i>Have Students Reflect on and Evaluate Own Writing</i>			
College Faculty	23	39	33
High School Faculty	34	47	14
<i>Direct Students to Institutional Support Services for Writing (e.g., Writing Center)</i>			
College Faculty	58	31	7
High School Faculty	18	29	47

^aWhere the total percentage does not equal 100, participants either did not respond or did not know if they engaged in this particular activity as described in our survey.

Table 3: Comparison of Teaching Practices and Corresponding Student Writing Activities

Teaching Practice Student Writing Activity	Always	Some	Never
Require Multiple Drafts on Writing Assignments			
College Faculty	30	51	17
High School Faculty	30	50	16
Write Multiple Drafts			
College Students	28	48	16
High School Students	16	61	11
Conference with Students on Papers in Progress			
College Faculty	17	46	32
High School Faculty	31	40	23
Discuss Writing with My Teacher			
College Students	13	56	22
High School Students	12	58	15
Have Students Read/Respond to Other Students' Work			
College Faculty	19	36	41
High School Faculty	26	55	14
Discuss My Writing with Other Students			
College Students	12	53	26
High School Students	23	48	16
Direct Students to Institutional Support Services for Writing (e.g., Writing Center)			
	58	31	7
College Faculty	18	29	47
High School Faculty			
Discuss My Writing with the Writing Center or a Tutor	3	22	65
College Students	2	23	56
High School Students			
Provide References/Handbooks/Websites			
College Faculty	52	33	11
High School Faculty	36	42	17
Consult Reference Books, Handouts, Websites			
College Students	37	47	7
High School Students	24	46	13

be surprising. What may be more (or less) surprising is the degree of similarity and difference between student and faculty responses at both levels, as Table 3 illustrates. For example, while 30% of high school faculty report “always” requiring multiple drafts, only 16% of high school students report “always” writing multiple drafts. And while 31% of high school faculty report “always” conferencing with students on papers in progress, only 12% of high school students report “always” discussing their writing with their teacher. At the college level, while 58% of the faculty “always” direct students to institutional support services

for writing and 31% do so “sometimes,” only 3% of students report “always” going to a writing center, and a small 22% “sometimes” seek institutional support services. These results and others suggest that even when faculty do engage in best practices for teaching writing, many students do not engage in best practices for learning how to write, calling attention to the need to find ways to encourage greater engagement among students for best practices in learning how to write.

One of the measures of the NSSE/WPA research that led to deep learning was clear expectations. We find this focus interesting given the wide variation in faculty and student rankings of writing abilities. If there is a high degree of clear expectations at play, should we not then expect student and faculty ranking of their writing abilities to be closely aligned? In our survey, faculty were asked to rank their students’ writing abilities on a number of measures using a scale of 1–5 (1=very dissatisfied, 5=very satisfied). Students were asked to rank their own writing abilities using the same scale. Results are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: College Students’ Writing Abilities as Ranked by Faculty and Students

	Mean College Faculty Rating			Mean College Student Rating	
	Fresh/ Sophomore	Junior/ Senior		Fresh/ Sophomore	Junior/ Senior
<i>Write appropriately for different audiences</i>	2.66	2.97		3.66	4.03
<i>Write appropriately for different purposes</i>	2.52	2.93		3.83	4.18
<i>Organize a paper</i>	2.49	2.91		3.87	4.15
<i>Develop a main idea</i>	2.57	2.90		3.91	4.21
<i>Use paragraphs appropriately</i>	2.71	2.97		4.0	4.28
<i>Use supporting evidence appropriately</i>	2.43	2.77		3.87	4.29
<i>Analyze data/ideas/arguments</i>	2.20	2.73		3.81	4.19
<i>Synthesize information from multiple sources</i>	2.28	2.70		3.70	4.11
<i>Appropriately use, cite and document sources</i>	2.03	2.63		3.61	4.00
<i>Quote and paraphrase appropriately</i>	2.13	2.63		3.70	4.10
<i>Record data and/or use detail</i>	2.37	2.87		3.65	4.01
<i>Use correct grammar and syntax</i>	2.42	2.71		3.86	4.15
<i>Employ correct mechanics (e.g., spelling)</i>	2.39	2.85		3.96	4.19

Table 5: High School Students' Writing Abilities as Ranked by Faculty and Students

	Mean College Faculty Rating			Mean College Student Rating	
	Fresh/ Sophomore	Junior/ Senior		Fresh/ Sophomore	Junior/ Senior
<i>Write appropriately for different audiences</i>	2.43	3.24		3.55	3.65
<i>Write appropriately for different purposes</i>	2.57	3.34		3.62	3.82
<i>Organize a paper</i>	2.69	3.25		3.73	3.81
<i>Develop a main idea</i>	2.83	3.36		3.67	3.84
<i>Use paragraphs appropriately</i>	2.75	3.36		3.71	4.10
<i>Use supporting evidence appropriately</i>	2.55	3.22		3.69	3.95
<i>Analyze data/ideas/arguments</i>	2.39	3.03		3.52	3.72
<i>Synthesize information from multiple sources</i>	2.20	2.78		3.38	3.64
<i>Appropriately use, cite and document sources</i>	2.18	2.92		3.56	3.71
<i>Quote and paraphrase appropriately</i>	2.14	2.97		3.51	3.85
<i>Record data and/or use detail</i>	2.41	3.04		3.56	3.70
<i>Use correct grammar and syntax</i>	2.52	3.11		3.60	3.80
<i>Employ correct mechanics (e.g., spelling)</i>	2.48	3.07		3.75	3.90

We asked faculty to rate how satisfied they are with students' ability on various markers of writing. For example, we asked them to rate how satisfied they are with students' ability to employ correct grammar and mechanics. The most highly satisfied faculty are those at the private high school, and the least satisfied those at the urban high school. Also in the least satisfied category are the faculty at the community colleges and, perhaps surprisingly, the faculty at the doctorate-granting flagship university. Lumped in the middle are the four-year schools, MA-granting university, and suburban public high school. It should be noted that on a scale of 1–5, with 1 being very dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied, not a single faculty rated their students overall a 4 or 5—the highest average score was a 3.48 and the lowest a 1.92.

Students, however, think much more highly of their abilities than their teachers. Student overall ratings ranged from a low of 3.19 to a high of 4.3. Interestingly, student ratings of themselves at the private high school were most

closely aligned with those of their teachers. Student ratings of themselves at the doctoral flagship university were least aligned with that of their teachers, followed closely by those at the urban high school. At the doctorate-granting institution, for example, faculty gave an overall score of 2.74 for student mastery of grammar, whereas the students gave themselves a 4.10. Several possible explanations could elucidate this disparity. One is that at this institution the highest percentage of students felt that their writing was equal to or better than that of their peers, thus indicating a generally higher self-perception of themselves as writers than students at other institutions or than their teachers feel is warranted. Of course, we might also want to consider class size (the smaller the class, the more direct communication between faculty and students, perhaps explaining why students at the private high school are most in line with their teachers). Further, it is possible that faculty have unrealistically high expectations for student writing. But in the end we ask whether such great disparities in the rankings between faculty and students can exist if clear expectations *for writing* are set. Perhaps the self-report aspect of NSSE is suspect here with the faculty choosing to respond to the questions on writing inflating the degree to which clear expectations are set? We hypothesize that the setting of clear expectations specifically for writing does not occur that often across the curriculum, thus leading to the disparity between faculty and student rankings. A study of direct evidence (e.g., actual faculty assignment sheets, peer review directions, etc.) is needed in order to begin to answer this question with any degree of validity.

Beyond Prewriting and Clear Expectations

NSSE's third scale is the degree to which faculty assign and students engage in higher-order writing. According to NSSE, the types of writing assignments that promote "deep learning" across the curriculum include those that focus on

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analysis, synthesis, and integration of ideas from various sources in ways that lead to engagement with course ideas both inside and outside of the classroom (22). But how much of the actual writing across the curriculum falls into this category? Further,

how does the writing assigned prepare students for the writing beyond the academy? In large-scale studies, institutional studies, and our own research, it seems that much of the writing assigned to students across the curriculum

does intend to promote deep learning, although very little prepares students for writing beyond the academy. For example, in 2003 Dan Melzer conducted textual analysis on 787 undergraduate writing assignments from forty-eight diverse academic institutions that were gathered via course websites. Melzer found, much like Britton and Applebee twenty years prior, that the majority of the writing was transactional (84%), with almost half of the writing consisting of traditional essay exams, research papers, and journals.² In the Faculty Survey of Student Writing administered by George Mason University the three most important writing tasks included research paper (57%), critique or review (39%), and journal or other reflection paper (34%). Melzer's research confirms our own results that college faculty provide little opportunity for exploratory writing or workplace-based genres. As we reflect on the types of writing being assigned we need to consider not only whether they promote deep learning but also whether the writing submitted by students evidences the deep learning intended as well as ways in which we may or may not be preparing students for life beyond the academy.³

While our work here focuses on high school and college writing, we should still be very aware of the concerns raised by Applebee and Langer in their analysis of the most recent set of NAEP data in relation to K–8 writing instruction. Most notably, Applebee and Langer conclude that students are simply not writing enough to prepare them for the demands of postsecondary education. They highlight the fact that “some 40% of twelfth-grade students . . . report never or hardly ever being asked to write a paper of three pages or more” (26). Not coincidentally, their analysis comes at the same time that influential educators and policymakers such as Dr. Diane Ravitch, former assistant secretary of education and currently a professor at New York University and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and Chester E. Finn, former professor at Vanderbilt University and former assistant secretary of education, have begun to reverse course on the value of the No Child Left Behind Act, charter schools, and other similar efforts. As quoted in a recent *New York Times* article: “‘Standards in many places, have proven nebulous and low,’ [Finn] writes in a coming essay. ‘Accountability’ has turned to test-cramming and bean-counting, often limited to basic reading and math skills” (Dillon).

Genres beyond the University

In *Writing: A Ticket to Work . . . or a Ticket Out*, the National Commission on Writing surveyed the Business Roundtable, an association of CEOs of many of the leading U.S. corporations. Among the findings is that “Writing is almost a universal professional skill required in service industries as well as finance,

insurance, and real estate” (7)—upward of 70% of salaried employees have writing responsibilities. Indeed, 96–100% of the students and faculty at each school in our survey think writing will be somewhat important or very important to their future success, and 93–100% believe they will write often or very often after graduation. Here, it seems that our research agrees with the National Commission’s. In our research, there is also significant consistency among students and faculty from all types of institutions about the role of writing in the workplace.

At this point we can share some useful information about the types of writing required in the workplace, college, and high school. In *Writing: A Ticket to Work . . . or a Ticket Out*, email and oral presentations with visual aids such as PowerPoint are “frequently” or “almost always” required 80–98% of the time, followed by memos and official correspondence (70%), formal reports (62%), and technical reports (59%) (11). Similarly, in *Writing: A Powerful Message from State Government*, the National Commission on Writing’s study of state government employees, email and memos/official correspondence are “frequently” or “almost always” required, followed by formal reports (71%), oral presentations (67%), technical reports (65%), legislative analysis (59%), and policy alerts (51%) (17).

But what do faculty view as the most important writing tasks? When asked to list the top three writing assignments they give to freshman/sophomores and juniors/seniors, college faculty responding to our survey named the assignments indicated in Table 6. In our survey high school faculty ranked the most

Many faculty resist workplace genres on philosophical grounds, often arguing that their role is to help prepare citizens of the world, not train workers.

important writing tasks assigned to freshman and sophomores as in-class writing, journals/reflective writing, and summaries/abstracts. At the junior/senior-level high school faculty chose research papers, critique, position paper, and analysis paper. The data seem to suggest

that high school faculty are following the lead of college faculty and working to prepare students for the types of writing they will encounter in college. But it may be that college faculty are not adequately preparing students for required writing tasks in the private or government sector. We doubt this is a matter of willful neglect on that part of faculty. After all, it would be as easy to assign memos as research papers.

Many faculty resist workplace genres on philosophical grounds, often arguing that their role is to help prepare citizens of the world, not train workers. While a student may never need to write an “academic” research paper

Table 6. Writing Tasks Assigned: College Faculty Reporting

Freshman/Sophomore		Junior/Senior	
Research Paper	34%	Research Paper	47%
Critique/Review Paper	27%	Analysis Paper	30%
Analysis Paper	27 %	Critique/Review Paper	23%
Journal/Reflection Paper	24%	Reaction Paper	18%
Reaction Paper	21 %	Position/Issue Paper	18%

in the workplace, many faculty see the experience of doing so as benefiting students immensely when it allows for the opportunity to entertain an idea, follow its intellectual trajectory, and engage in its debate. As mentioned earlier, some research suggests that such noble goals, even if desirable, often are not met within the context of most writing assignments. Although we do not find the cultivating of critical citizens and productive workers as mutually exclusive endeavors, we will sidestep this particular issue for now and focus on an emerging line of research that may help us better understand what is at stake.

It has been posited by some that the abilities to analyze, synthesize, and integrate knowledge transfer across genres, thus making it less important to teach the genres of the workplace in the academy. Recent work by Elizabeth Wardle, David Smit, Anne Beaufort, Linda Bergman and Janet Zepernick, and others seeks to strongly draw our attention to the issue of transfer. In particular, they seek to understand whether the work students do in first-year composition courses transfers to other contexts, especially within the academy. Their attention to transfer comes on the heels of many studies strongly suggesting writing instruction is not preparing students for the literacy demands placed on them outside of school (Anson and Forsberg; Odell and Goswami; Spilka). But given the research by members of our own field as well as those reaching the same conclusions who are outside our field, alongside the findings of the National Commission on Writing, we must ask whether studying current practices for evidence of transfer is worthwhile. For example, it may be that issues of articulation and issues of transfer go hand-in-hand. In other words, growing evidence may suggest that what teachers and employers articulate as best practices in writing vary across discipline and context. Further, even within the same discipline teachers may not be doing enough to articulate best practices to their students or employing the required meta-language as defined by Janet Giltrow, thus contributing to the disconnect we see in this data between students and teachers. If there is a problem of articulation, then

a valid study of transfer must also take into account matters of articulation. As a step in this direction, we suggest that rhetoric and composition as a field must establish a framework for the literacy demands in academia and beyond to which the work completed in first year writing courses must aspire, all the while being grounded not in its role as a service course but rather in the rich rhetorical tradition that reaches back thousands of years.

Writing Attributes beyond the University

In addition to genre, we have evidence of the *value* that employers, faculty, and students place on certain aspects of writing. In the National Commission on Writing report, 96% of employers view *accuracy* as “extremely important” or “important,” 97% view *clarity* as “extremely important” or “important,” and 95% view *spelling, punctuation and grammar* as “extremely important” or “important” (“Writing: A Ticket to Work” 28). In our survey, faculty were asked to identify the five most important characteristics of good writing in their field. Interestingly, as Figure 2 indicates, among college faculty, organization was chosen more often than any other characteristic (66%), followed closely by analysis data/ideas/arguments (59%), and use supporting evidence appropriately (57%).

We are struck by the interesting lack of focus on audience and purpose by faculty in the disciplines—especially given the emphasis that rhetoric and composition and our textbooks place on it. This result could be explained in

We are struck by the interesting lack of focus on audience and purpose by faculty in the disciplines—especially given the emphasis that rhetoric and composition and our textbooks place on it.

that faculty in the disciplines are not as aware of the role that audience and purpose play in helping a writer make sound rhetorical choices; thus, if a paper is well organized, it is “readable” by the audience and supports its purpose

nearly invisibly. However, given the amount of transactional writing found by Melzer that, by definition, has as one of its primary foci audience, it could be that faculty across the curriculum do care quite a bit about audience but have not articulated it in the ways composition does. This finding is worth further exploration for those of us interested in writing across the curriculum.

We’d like to end our look at the survey results on a truly affective note. After all, if people just do not like to write, we have an entirely different battle to wage. In some ways, the results of the data are not surprising. As Table 7 indicates, nearly half of the high school students reported that they enjoyed writing for their own personal goals but disliked assigned school writing. What

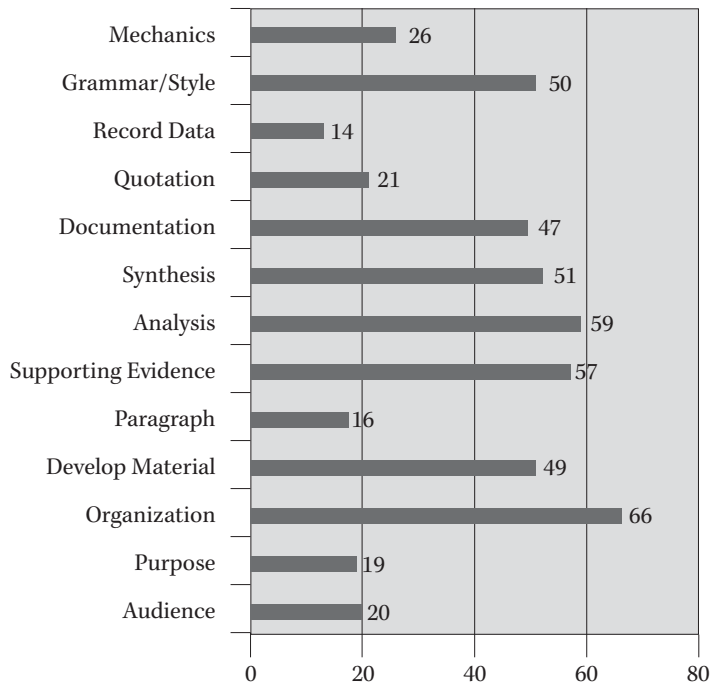


Figure 2. College Faculty Views of Good Writing in the Disciplines.

is perhaps surprising is that 41% of college students reported that they enjoy writing and look forward to most writing tasks, whereas only 28% of high school students felt that way. Numerous reasons could exist for this change: As students progress through college, they perhaps gain more confidence as writers (indeed 56% of college students felt that they write as well as or better than their peers), and a more confident writer is one who can approach a new writing task without apprehension. It may also be that college students have been writing more—since elementary school perhaps or since high school certainly—and they have simply gained more experience with writing. With more experience, they have confidence that they can meet the goals of a new writing situation. Alternatively, as found in the Pew Internet and American Life/ National Commission on Writing report, *Writing, Teens, and Technology*, part of the story is that what teenagers define as writing is not nearly as inclusive as what we might define as writing (Lenhart et al.). In other words, the teens in this

survey did not consider what we in rhetoric and composition would call digital or multimodal writing (emails, blogging, texting, and the like) as writing. Thus, teenagers may actually be writing more than ever but in a far greater variety of forms not normally recognized as part of the school or work experience. These results, which are worthy of further exploration but are beyond the scope of this article, do leave us with a positive note: for our students, writing is not necessarily the “dreaded” activity that many of us imagine.

Suggested Futures

So far in this article we have offered a snapshot of writing practices throughout the country in high schools, colleges, and workplaces based on our own research and that of others. To summarize this snapshot, we believe that the data suggest that faculty are assigning and students are completing writing assignments, that some deep learning is taking place and that students and

Table 7: Students’ Affective Response to Writing and Their Abilities

	College Students	High School Students
I enjoy writing and look forward to most writing tasks	41	28
I enjoy writing for personal goals but do not like school-related writing	36	48
I do not like to write	16	13
I think I write as well or better than most of my peers	56	30
I think I write about the same as my peers	25	39
I think most of my peers write better than I do	7	12
I think almost all of my peers write better than I do	1	1
I don’t know how my writing compares to my peers	3	6

faculty view writing as important beyond school. As we overlay our research data, though, with data from other studies, a more complex picture of literacy emerges, one in which writing in the disciplines and beyond the academy plays an increasingly important role to which composition must pay attention. As we look at rhetoric and composition's present as reflected in the data we have presented, we are drawn to look also at its future, a future that we believe would be best served by an expanded view of how best to accomplish our varied missions as we help students negotiate literacy demands in the academy and beyond. Therefore, we offer the following recommendations for future endeavors.

As we look at rhetoric and composition's present as reflected in the data we have presented, we are drawn to look also at its future, a future that we believe would be best served by an expanded view of how best to accomplish our varied missions as we help students negotiate literacy demands in the academy and beyond.

1. *The partnership between NSSE and WPA should serve as a model for many of our future research efforts.* While it is important for individual researchers to serve as consultants to the College Board, the Department of Education, and the like, it is equally important that we explore useful collaborations wherein we put ourselves as an organization in the position of defining the questions asked, thus giving visibility to our work and helping define the issues. Relatedly, it is important that we critically embrace these opportunities to learn from others what constitutes successful literacy practices in order to continually refine our own work. Finally, from an economic perspective, it is vital that we leverage our limited resources. In the NSSE-WPA collaboration, NSSE was used to distribute the survey widely, thus providing far-reaching coverage. In our own study, for example, we found it difficult to obtain the various permissions needed to distribute our surveys at high schools and colleges. Utilizing a resource such as NSSE, which already has access to institutions—and is in fact sought out by institutions that desire information about their students and faculty—makes collecting significant amounts and kinds of data more feasible. Being able to have a similar resource to obtain data about high schools would offer us further insight into the connections we currently have and want to foster with each other. Perhaps the Committee on Research and Committee on Professional Visibility and Databases within CCCC could be jointly charged with fostering and sustaining such collaborations.

2. *We need to help diversify the types of writing taught through a vertical curriculum that begins in high school, continues through college, and specifically fosters transfer across contexts.* Promoting a balanced emphasis on literary analysis alongside rhetorical analysis in high school could lead to students who are better prepared for the writing required of them in college and the workplace. Here we imagine an interdisciplinary curriculum in high school and college English departments that does not displace literary studies but rather re-establishes the importance of English studies broadly conceived at all levels and within all disciplines. Further, we suggest taking a close look at whether or not “the essay” as a genre is still a useful or viable genre upon which to base writing curricula at all levels. If the essay is no longer a viable genre, or even if it is, we need to do more to encourage instruction in genres that embrace both the deep learning promoted when writing is an integral part of any course as well as exhibit the multimodal skills now required across the curriculum and into the workplace. One possibility among many is literary journalism that is rooted in artfully crafted narrative and critical research-based writing. Working with the NCTE Secondary Section and directly with school districts across the county, CCCC could provide a framework for a WAC-centered vertical curriculum for high school through college that takes into consideration workplace writing concerns. This framework would not necessarily require teaching workplace genres but does require careful scaffolding that fosters clear articulation and transfer of skills across writing contexts instead of current practices that assume transfer without fostering it.
3. *To call for more empirical research, especially large-scale and longitudinal studies, is too obvious.* Instead, we call for utilizing the Internet to its fullest potential in order to both improve our research practices and ability to disseminate results. No doubt there are much good data from institutionally based or single-classroom-based studies that, when viewed alone, might not have much merit for a larger audience but when combined with the data from other studies can lead to useful insights about the work we and our students do. This is not a call simply for a clearinghouse for published and unpublished research reports but also a repository for raw data and the tools used to collect that data. A repository is important for many reasons. First, high publishing costs have resulted in research reports that, due to space constraints, neces-

sarily exclude important measurement tools, abstract data in ways that constrain its meaning or lack even a sampling of raw data and other important information. Second, the primary means of comparing results across multiple studies, meta-analysis, has come under increasing fire for its inability to eliminate differences in research approaches to a reliable degree. As Gene Glass argues: “Meta-analysis needs to be replaced by archives of raw data that permit the construction of complex data landscapes that depict the relationships among independent, dependent and mediating variables” (par. 48).

We are certainly not the only researchers to call for such a forum. For example, the purpose and goals of the “Research Exchange” are very similar to those outlined above. Unfortunately this important effort has stalled, and we recognize that without greater exigency, wider adoption, and support such efforts are difficult to sustain. One way to reignite and sustain such efforts is if, under CCCC sponsorship, an online peer-reviewed journal is established that allows for more timely and detailed reports than possible with print publications. Further, as in *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, publication in this journal could require authors to archive their measurement tools and raw data at the journal website repository of data. This repository, including both direct and indirect evidence, could be maintained and made available to all researchers.

As is probably apparent, we have much more data from our research to share with those who are interested. Likewise, over the past two years as we have been thinking about our research in relation to other research in the field, we have discovered many studies—some small, some large, some national, some local—that address complementary angles to our own research. Yet, we discover these by chance and happenstance just as often as we read about others in a published forum. Having such a repository for instruments, raw data, and results, ideally housed at NCTE/CCCC, would provide our field with an invaluable resource and allow researchers to see how the data can be shaped. Glass posits:

We can move toward this vision of useful synthesized archives of research now if we simply re-orient our ideas about what we are doing when we do research. We are not testing grand theories. . . . We are not informing colleagues that our straw-person null hypothesis has been rejected at the .01 level, rather we are sharing data collected and reported according to some commonly accepted protocols. We aren’t publishing “studies,” rather we are contributing to data archives. (par. 49)

Toward this end we want to make our survey tools and raw data widely available (and welcome queries addressed to either author) and invite researchers to send us teacher and student portfolios for inclusion in an open database.

This resource will benefit not only researchers but also the entire field—scholars and teachers at all levels. Further, it will provide the field with necessary information as we continue our literacy advocacy efforts within the public sphere. We invite *CCC* readers to share or comment upon our vision and to add their work to our own.

Appendix: Student Survey of Writing in College

1. Your gender:

Female Male

2. How old are you?

3. Currently I am:

A first- or second-year college student

A community college student for more than one year

A junior or senior college student at a four-year school

4. Which kind of high school did you attend?

Public Private

5. How many years of English did you take in high school?

1 2 3 4

6. Have you taken other kinds of writing classes, such as journalism, creative writing, or any other kind of course in which a primary focus was writing?

No Yes. Name of course(s):

7. Which of the following kinds of writing tasks do you recall doing during high school in any kind of class? (Some answers will overlap. Please check as many as apply.)

Research paper

Essay exam answers

Personal narrative (a non-fiction piece about yourself)

Essay

An obituary

A poem

Analysis of a poem, story, or other reading

Short story

Newspaper article or letter to the editor

Speech

Argumentative paper

Lab report

Summary

Evaluation

Journal or other reflective writing

Professional letter

Issue paper

Collaborative (or group) paper

Other (please specify)

8. When you wrote papers in your English classes, did you get written feedback from your teacher about the quality of the paper?

Yes No

9. Did you usually receive a grade for the paper?

Yes No

10. In your best estimate, how often did you have writing tasks/assignments in classes other than English?

Often Occasionally Rarely Never

11. If you wrote in other classes, what classes did you write in?

(Check as many as apply.)

History

Science

Math

P.E.

Civics

Geography

Health

Foreign Language

Other (please specify)

12. When you produced writing in other classes, did you get written feedback from your teacher about the quality of the paper?

Yes No

13. Did you usually receive a grade for the writing?

Yes No

The following questions will ask about your overall experiences and attitudes about writing.

14. How important do you think writing is to your future job or career?

Very Somewhat Neither important Not very important Don't know
important important nor unimportant

15. How often do you think you will have to write after you finish high school?

Very often Often Rarely Never

16. How would you characterize your feelings about writing? (Choose the answer that is the closest match to your feelings.)

I enjoy writing and look forward to most writing tasks.

I enjoy writing for personal goals but do not like school-related writing.

I do not like to write.

17. Which of these responses best matches your perception of your writing ability?

I think I write as well or better than most of my peers.

I think I write about the same as my peers.

I think most of my peers write better than I do.

I think almost all of my peers write better than I do.

I don't know how my writing compares to my peers.

18. How much emphasis do you think your school places on writing?

Too much

Enough

Not enough

Don't know

19. How satisfied are you with your ability to:

	Very dissatisfied		Very satisfied	
Write appropriately for different audiences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organize a paper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop a main idea	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use paragraphs appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use supporting evidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analyze ideas/arguments/data	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Synthesize information from multiple sources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appropriately use, cite, and document sources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quote and paraphrase appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Record data and/or use appropriate level of detail	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use correct grammar and syntax	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employ correct mechanics (spelling and punctuation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. To what extent do you engage in the following strategies when writing?

	Always use	Sometimes use	Never use	Don't know
Write multiple drafts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss my writing with my teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss my writing with the Writing Center or a tutor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss my writing with other students (including peer review)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Discuss my writing with
someone other than my
teacher or tutor

☐☐☐☐

Consult reference books
or websites

☐☐☐☐

The following questions will ask about your experiences writing in college.

21. Did you take a freshman composition course at this or another institution?

Yes

No

22. Have you taken any other kind of course that focuses on writing at this or another institution?

No

Yes. Type of course:

23. Have you taken other English classes?

Yes

No

24. As you reflect upon your college experience, how often did you have to write in courses outside of English?

In most courses

In some courses

In a few courses

Never

25. If you wrote in other classes, what classes did you write in?

(Check as many as apply.)

History

Science

Math

Psychology

Economics

Education

Business

Engineering

Geography

Philosophy

Anthropology

Sociology

Social Work

Speech

Health Sciences/Nursing

Foreign Language

Professional field/Other (please specify)

26. What kinds of writing did you have to produce? (Some answers will overlap.

Please check as many as apply.)

Summary and/or analysis

Abstract or precis

Research paper

Lab report
Personal opinion paper
Annotated bibliography
News stories and/or press releases
Essay exam answers
Case study and/or narratives
Journals and/or other reflection papers
Impromptu in-class writing
Reaction paper
Outline writing
Critiques, evaluations, or reviews
Professional letters and/or memos
Literature review
Collaborative (or group) project
Analysis of a poem, story, or other reading
Other (please specify)

27. Did your professors give you guidelines about how to write in various disciplines?

Yes No

28. Other than English classes, did your professors devote class time to discussing the paper, giving advice about how to write it, or the like?

In most course In some courses In a few courses Never

29. When you produced writing in other classes, did you get written feedback from your teacher about the quality of the paper?

Yes No

30. Did you receive a grade on the writing?

Yes No

Acknowledgment

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Notes

1. A significant body of scholarship has addressed the concepts of deep learning. According to Laird, Schwarz, Shoup, and Kuh, “students who use deep approaches to learning tend to perform better as well as retain, integrate, and transfer information at higher rates than students using surface approaches to learning” (3). To measure deep learning, NSSE uses three subscales: higher-order learning, integrative learning, and reflective learning. NSSE acknowledges that the questions in each subscale are not “intended as a replacement for other, more in-depth measures of deep learning; it [the instrument] serves as a quick way to address this important

concept in a survey that reaches a substantial number of college students every year” (Laird, Shoup, and Kuh).

2. Melzer categorized writing samples following the research of James Britton:

Britton divided writing into three different “functions,” which correspond to different points on the rhetorical triangle of writer (the expressive function), text (the poetic function), and audience (the transactional function). Transactional assignments ask students to inform or persuade an audience; for example, a book review, annotated bibliography, or editorial. Expressive assignments are informal and exploratory, with minimal demands for structure and the self as audience. Freewrites and personal journals are typical expressive assignments. Poetic writing is imaginative, with the focus on the text itself as an art form. Poems, stories, and plays are common poetic assignments. Based on Timothy Crusius’ (1989) critique of Britton’s categories, which Crusius feels lack a place for informal writing for an audience beyond the self, I added one more category, “exploratory.” Like expressive assignments, exploratory assignments are informal and focus on exploring ideas, but the audience is public and the form is usually more structured than expressive assignments. (88)

3. That college should be preparing students for their professional lives is certainly a debate that can be traced back at least to the Morrill Act about the value of higher education in general and a student’s purpose for attending university. We do not dismiss the intrinsic value of education to broaden one’s mind and engage deeply with new ideas. Nor do we think that the writing courses should be limited in scope to providing a service to the university and its students: gaining rhetorical awareness and sophistication promotes engaged citizenry and academic success. In today’s economies of academia and the world, scholars and teachers cannot blindly ignore that students, parents, taxpayers, and legislators believe that a higher education in general is a way to a better life and job.

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